

## Loss and Survival 3-9-18

As I walked around recently taking pictures of the high ground water everywhere, I recalled the fond memory of ice skating in the woods as a child behind Ralph Talbot School in South Weymouth. That's right, skating in the woods. My father had taught us to keep an eye out for twigs on the ice. If they get under the skate blade, your feet can suddenly slide out from under you. These lessons from my father were useful for developing observational and survival skills.

There was no skill set or observation or knowledge that prepared us for Storm Riley. MEMA (Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency) sent detailed descriptions of the storm and offered conference calls. Last Thursday's conference call had very strong and explicit wording of the storm being potentially life-threatening. The concerns were mainly focused on flooding issues, with the astronomical influences of the full moon and high tides and strong wind. The prediction, what MEMA calls a "Situational Awareness Statement", also stated the storm had "some potential for power outages."

And, yes, there was significant flooding and high tide/storm surge damage. People saw that coming and evacuated from the those low lying coastal communities. Who could have foreseen, though, the devastation and deaths from downed trees? Many trees were uprooted because the ground was so saturated. Others were snapped in half like twigs.

We were told of high winds and wind gusts of 40 to 50 miles per hour, reaching as high as 60 to 75 miles per hour, and possibly upward of 80 to 90 miles per hour during the peak time on Friday, along the immediate coast and over the Cape and Islands. Clearly no one foresaw the inland high winds and/or the micro-bursts. I am not certain that we received microbursts, as they usually occur during hot humid months, but Mayflower Road in Plympton appears to be the result of one. The street was filled with downed trees and in the woods along the road, dozens more, including many of the snapped-in-half type.

While it is never safe to be outside during a storm, sometimes it necessary or people were simply out because they were trying to get home to be safe in a non-flood area to take care of their home and family. It is such a tragedy that Plympton lost a young man in his own vehicle in his own driveway to Storm Riley. Having lost a son myself, my heart goes out to his family who must be in a state of shock. They have a heavy journey ahead of them, for sure. That difficult road is paved with love to carry them along. Plympton mourns for them.

All the deaths from this storm were from downed trees. After seeing the roads blocked, the cars crushed, wires brought down by trees and houses holding up trees, it is a wonder that our emergency responders were not killed. Trees were still coming down as they were cutting up trees and rescuing people. People have heart attacks and injuries and illnesses during storms, just as they do any other time, and ambulances had to find a way to transport them.

We have lost lives and have lost possessions. Those who survived are grateful to have done so. Recovery will take months. Tree cutters will be in high demand and will have to

prioritize. My large fallen trees will be understandably low on the list, as they fell away from the house and are not near wires or buildings.

Electricians will be in high demand as people consider upgrading their generators to be hard wired. The stores will sell a lot of chain saws and generators and chippers.

There will be an abundance of fire wood from the maples and oaks, but what will happen to the soft pines? They are so brittle and so many fell! Where does all the chipped wood go? I have been told that there isn't a market for it locally and when land developers have a large amount, they must transport it to biomass fuel energy plants. Some people hate woods chips, linking it with ants and yet others garden with it or use it for mulch. I know someone who covers stumps with wood chips, causing the stumps to decompose over a year or so. It is a type of composting that might be needed by many of us after this devastating storm.

I have touched upon only the tip of the iceberg on the effects of and recovery from this storm which is branded onto our collective memory. Our children and grandchildren will be talking about this one.

I hope that locally and at the state level we will have a de-briefing on this. I hope that meteorologists can help us to better predict so that we can be better prepared to survive and to prevent loss.

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